



Dear Baby TALK Parents,

Your baby is a very different person than he was just two short months ago! Isn't it incredible how rapidly changes occur in the earliest months of human life? It is an exciting time to be a parent, even if it is exhausting!

For most four-month-old infants, life is somewhat more settled at four months than it was a short while ago. Your baby probably cries less than he did earlier because his central nervous system is better able to handle the many sensations in his world. His schedule is probably becoming more predictable. You may be feeling a little more in control of your life now, because a schedule for your days is emerging.

FOR LAUGHING OUT LOUD

You are undoubtedly relieved that your baby is probably crying less and generally seems to be enjoying the world more these days. Three to six-month-old babies are often noted for the frequency of their good moods. You have probably noticed that your baby has become much more sociable, responding easily to play and conversation. Many babies at this age even begin laughing out loud—a real delight to hear.

However, two new challenges may turn your baby's laughter back to tears: the anxiety of stranger awareness and the discomfort of teething. Sometime in the weeks to come, you may notice that your baby is no longer happy to be passed around from one adult to another. He may look warily at strangers and appear to want

no part of them. When he has been cared for by another adult, he may fall apart and burst into tears when you return to "rescue" him! Although all this crying is costly to both of you, it's a good sign of a strong attachment growing between you. He is expressing as clearly as he knows how that he loves you best. So even though the crying is unpleasant, you must be happy for what it says about the bond between you and your child!

Another cause for crying at this stage is the beginning of teething. Some babies suffer a great deal with this discomfort which is thought to feel something like a painful splinter in a finger. Your baby is probably teething if she cries out when you press on her gums. Some babies even refuse to suck because their gums hurt. Try rubbing your baby's gums before feeding to lessen the pain. For most infants, teeth don't begin to appear until six-nine months. Your baby may be teething for some time!

SHE DOESN'T MISS A THING

One of the most exciting changes at this time of your child's life is the cognitive burst that usually happens at about four-and-a-half-months of age. Suddenly, most babies become very aware of everything around them, intent on learning about everything in their environments. It is thrilling to watch your child "tune in" to the world at this time.

Unfortunately, this new curiosity and awareness can present some real challenges for parents! One example is in the area of feeding. Your baby may be simply unable to finish eating because he is so distracted by the sight and sounds around him. Both breast and bottle-feeding parents report their frustration in getting through a feeding uninterrupted at this stage. And of course, interacting with you is the biggest distraction of all, as feeding continues to be about more than just food. Your baby loves the play that occurs between you during those meals.

Try to remember that your baby won't starve, and surely will get enough milk to sustain life during this exciting time! Also remember that he has probably become a very efficient nurser and can down quite a bit of milk in a very short time now.

THE NIGHT OWL

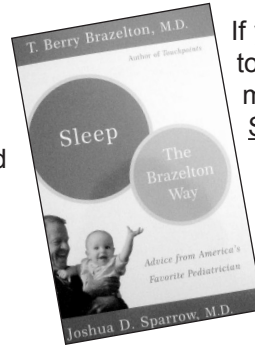
Another part of your life that may be complicated by this cognitive burst is your child's ability to **sleep** through the night. Perhaps you have finally arrived at the point at which your child is sleeping for a longer period at night, maybe even eight hours. What a relief! And then at about four-and-a-half-months he may start waking again every four hours. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

Your child's life is composed of four hour cycles of sleeping and waking. Even though he may not be really awake after four hours of sleep, your baby may be cycling through a time of light sleep. Instead of going back down into deeper sleep, he becomes aware of the world around him and wakes himself up by crying out.

At this point, parents have to make a decision about how to respond to this night waking. Many tired parents get up and feed the baby, even taking the baby into bed with them. Parents need their sleep, too, and must be alert during the day to meet other demands.

However, if parents can encourage a **self-comforting routine** - helping babies find their thumb or pacifier, patting them gently on the bottom, humming softly, but **not** taking them out of the crib - this night waking will likely last only a short time. Babies who have learned to comfort themselves back to sleep often return pretty quickly to sleeping through the night.

Another practice which can begin to encourage good sleeping habits at this age is establishing a supportive bedtime routine. At bedtime, feed your baby, rock her, sing to her, hold her close and then put her in her crib **before** she goes to sleep. She will become comfortable with being in her bed still awake and then falling to sleep on her own.

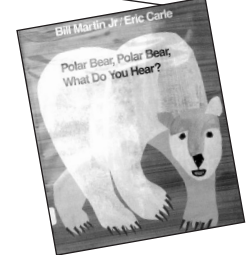
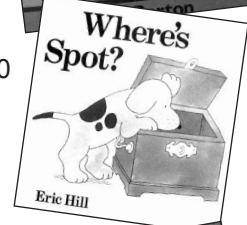
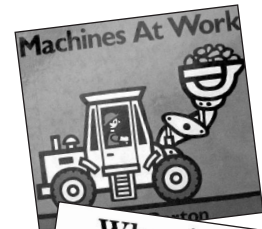


If you are trying to figure out how to manage your baby's sleep, you may be interested in reading Sleep: The Brazelton Way by Brazelton and Sparrow (Perseus, 2003). This little book provides a good discussion of sleep behaviors and routines.

THE EYES HAVE IT

Babies at this age stare at things a lot. They spend most of their waking time trying to memorize every detail around them, and they are fascinated by what they see. Looking at bold, colorful illustrations in books can provide great entertainment for little eyes. Try propping open a book by the side of the crib, or lay an open book on the floor in front of your baby when he is laying on his tummy. These books feature colorful contrasting illustrations sure to fascinate your little one:

- Machines at Work
- Byron Barton,
- Crowell 1987
- Inside Freight Train
- Donald Crews,
- Harper Collins 2001
- Feathers for Lunch
- Lois Ehlert, Harcourt 1990
- Where's Spot?
- Eric Hill, Putnam 2000
- Dots, Spots, Speckles and Stripes
- Tana Hoban,
- Greenwillow 1987
- Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?
- Martin, Bill, Jr.
- Illustrated by Eric Carle,
- Holt 1991



BABY'S BODY

You have probably noticed a tremendous change in your baby's ability to **control his own body**. Now, when you pull him up to a sit, his head doesn't fall back but rather remains upright. When laid on his tummy, he may push up on his arms. He may even roll over! And when on his back, he enjoys holding his feet in the air and kicking.

He has also discovered how to use his hands. At first he was only able to **bat** and **swipe** at objects. Now he delights in being able to **reach** and **grasp** them, which he will do with increasing accuracy in the months to come! Your baby is learning to bring all of his senses together to accomplish what he wants to do: He **hears** an object, **turns** his head toward the sound, **sees** the object, reaches for the object, **holds** the object, **shakes** the object to reproduce the sound and eventually **mouths** the



object. What an accomplishment! Your baby has had to master many new skills to get where he is now!

Upon arriving at his new level of abilities, your baby will become a more active "player" in his environment. He can really begin to "make things happen and to pursue his own desire to learn."

Although this is a very exciting time, it is also a dangerous time. Not only will your baby put her teething toys into her mouth, but she will also taste every paper clip, button, bug and piece of lint which crosses her path. Now is the time to thoroughly **babyproof** your child's environment. Pick up all small items, put "shock stops" in electrical outlets, leave no cords dangling and put all chemical substances out of reach. Your baby's abilities will out-distance her common sense for the next few years!

BEST WISHES FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT BABY TALK

 **Baby TALK**

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